

State of Michigan
Citizen's Foster Care Review Board Program



2001

Annual Report



*The children depicted on this cover
are available for adoption. Contact
the Michigan Adoption Resource
Exchange (MARE) at 1-800-589-6273.*

Overview

The Citizens' Foster Care Review Board Program is comprised of local residents who meet once a month to review random cases of abused/neglected children in foster care. The Program Advisory Committee is a collaborative body of representatives from each local board and individuals from the child welfare community. The data presented in this Annual Report, along with the recommendations contained herein, are the product of this collaborative effort and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Michigan Supreme Court, or the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO), under whose auspices this Program is conducted.

The Michigan Citizens' Foster Care Review Board Program was established by the Legislature to monitor children who are in foster care because of abuse or neglect. Thirty local review boards, consisting of citizens from the community, meet one day each month to review random case plans of children in temporary care. Additionally, boards are required to review case plans of permanent wards who have not moved in a timely manner to an adoptive placement following the termination of their parents' rights. Boards also hold appeal hearings when foster parents object to the removal of a ward from their home. Throughout the year, boards confer with judges, agency directors, legislators, and other child welfare advocates.

Boards observe the child welfare system from their unique position and report back to the Legislature, the Governor, and the public in this report. The annual report is a summary of board activities and identifies problems that impede permanent placement of children. Additionally, the report recommends improvements to timely placement of children in permanent settings.

Information in this report is aggregated from all thirty review boards. Data for specific boards and/or counties can be obtained by contacting the Program office.

To the Readers of Our Annual Report:

As you read the 2001 Annual Report, you will note that the principal reasons that children become "stuck" in the system are related either to the behavior of their parents or their own behavior. In fact, nine of the top twelve reasons that temporary wards remain in the system are related to the parents' inability to understand the problems that caused the removal of their children or their unwillingness to deal with those issues.

In the course of our monthly reviews we have observed that many parents coming into contact with the system seem to be stressed out and completely overwhelmed by their parental responsibilities. At the same time, children who come into care appear to be exhibiting more severe behaviors than ever before. Yet, many of the services provided to children and parents do not appear to meet their specific needs and multiple problems.

Time limits imposed by the 1997 Binsfeld Legislation, to keep children from lingering in the system, have made it extremely important to identify the specific needs of children and their parents early on in the process and provide them with services which are tailored to meet those needs. Equally important is the task of helping parents understand that they will in fact benefit from the services being provided, and that they have a realistic hope of regaining custody of their children. Caseworkers and service providers who regularly meet with parents, children and foster parents seem to find ways of achieving these objectives.

However, far too many Parent Agency Treatment Plans still seem to be generic in nature, having been developed without the input of parents, children or other human services professionals. Many organizations

providing services to the child welfare system carry forward the same one-size-fits-all approach because the specific needs of clients have not been identified. This has led to one-size-fits-all parenting classes, substance abuse counseling, domestic violence treatment; and even one-size-fits-all individual and family counseling. It should come as no surprise that few if any of these programs are willing to evaluate the progress of the individuals and state whether they have benefitted from the services offered. Instead, programs simply issue certificates stating that individuals have participated (i.e., attended regularly) but nothing more. Sadly, some caseworkers and jurists accept these certificates as evidence that the individuals have been rehabilitated.

We believe the one-size-fits-all approach does a great injustice to children and families. It is ineffective and inefficient. It costs the State more money than it saves. The recommendations at the end of this report urge those within the system to reevaluate the process for determining the needs of children and families in order to provide them with services which will meet their needs. We also encourage jurists to question the content of services provided to clients to insure that they have benefitted. We believe these recommendations to be in the best interests of children and families. Additionally, a side benefit is likely to be more effective use of limited resources.



Randall J. Wilger, Chair
FCRBP Advisory Committee

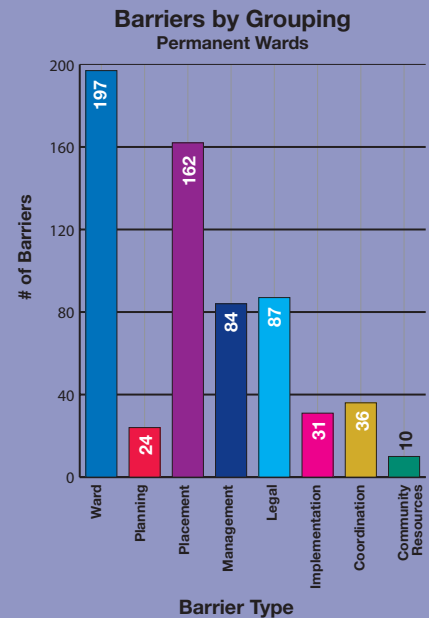
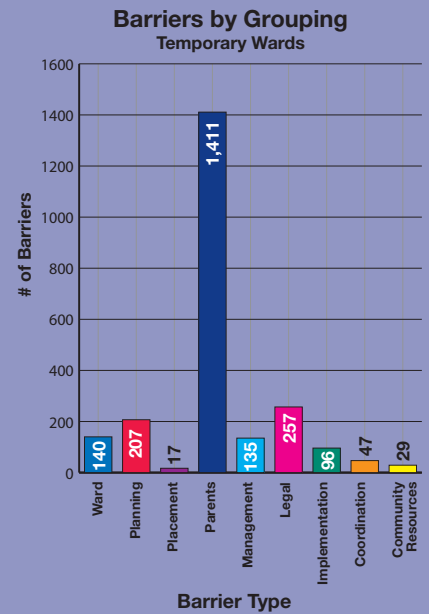
Top Barriers to Permanency in 2001

Temporary Wards

- Parental Lack of Insight into Problems
- Parental Substance Abuse
- Ward's Own Behavior
- Parental Non-Compliance with Parent/Agency Agreement
- Parental Inadequate/Inappropriate Housing
- Parental Resistance/Uncooperation to Service Intervention
- Parental Lack of Judgment (Vulnerability to Inappropriate Influence of Others/Peers)
- Parental Low Functioning (Limited Abilities, Lack of Coping Skills)
- Plan Inappropriate (Does Not Appear Feasible Based on Documentation)
- Parental Inability/Unwillingness to Protect Child
- Lawyer/Guardian ad Litem Not Taking Active Role in Case
- Parental Chronic Mental Illness

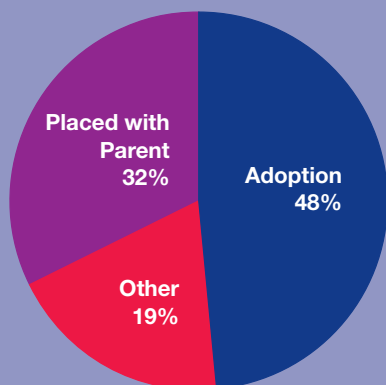
Permanent Wards

- Ward's Own Behavior
- Lack of Appropriate Adoptive Homes
- Appeal of Termination Pending
- Other - Placement Barriers

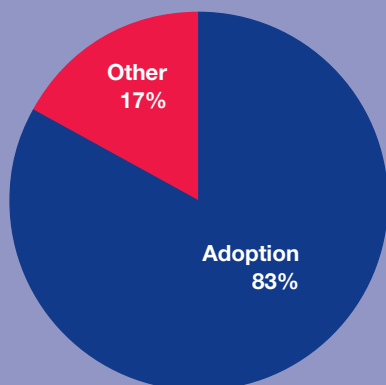


These graphs indicate, by temporary and permanent wards, the barriers to achieving the permanency plan as determined by a board after each ward review.

Resolution of Cases Under Foster Care Review Temporary Wards



Resolution of Cases Under Foster Care Review Permanent Wards



Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

These graphs indicate, by temporary and permanent wards, the final status of cases at the time the board discontinued review.

- Other - Legal Barriers
- Lack of Progress (Established Plan Not Being Addressed in a Timely or Substantive Manner)
- Lack of Documentation in Case Record
- Inadequate Coordination Between FIA and POS
- Plan Unclear
- Caseworker Change Delays Progress
- FIA Inadequate Monitoring of Purchase of Service Agency
- Inadequate Coordination within the FIA

2001 Program Recommendations

(Bold denotes main topic of recommendation)

TEMPORARY WARDS

1. We recommend that Family Independence Agency/Purchase of Service (FIA/POS) agencies facilitate **psycho-social assessments for all involved parents** and incorporate the findings and recommendations of the assessments into the Parent Agency Treatment Plans.
2. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies require caseworkers to develop **Parent Agency Treatment Plans** in conjunction with children (age permitting), parents, and such other professionals (e.g. Mental Health) as appropriate in order to arrive at a plan which takes into account the specific needs and capabilities of all parties involved in order to create a realistic blueprint for successful reunification. Collaborative decision making and/or **permanency planning mediation** should be encouraged in the creation of meaningful treatment plans.
3. We recommend that the FIA research and develop a protocol to determine when **concurrent planning** is appropriate in light of parents' past history in order to expedite permanency and facilitate more effective utilization of scarce service resources.
4. We recommend that the FIA research and develop more effective **parenting classes** that will address the specific needs of parents and their children (i.e. children with special needs; parents with substance abuse problems; low functioning or mentally ill parents; etc.). Such classes should ideally include children in some sessions and require the provider of the classes to assess parenting ability.
5. We recommend that the FIA establish/expand **parent mentoring programs** using trained volunteers in order to provide parents with additional resources as appropriate.
6. We recommend that courts require **developmental assessments of children** when they are adjudicated temporary court wards and the findings and recommendations of the assessments be incorporated into the children's service plans.
7. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies establish **partnerships with domestic violence service providers** to insure services to parents with dependency issues and/or a history of violent relationships.

8. We recommend that the Michigan Supreme Court explore the creation of an **Office of Lawyer-Guardian ad Litem** as a vehicle for training, monitoring, and enforcing the provisions of 1998 PA 480 to provide children with adequate legal representation.
9. We recommend that the SCAO, in conjunction with the FIA, continue efforts to establish a **Family Drug Court** model in dependency cases where parental substance abuse is an issue.
10. We recommend that the Michigan Legislature provide **adequate funding** for foster care and therapeutic services for children and parents.

PERMANENT WARDS

(Recommendations for permanent wards are often related to issues that were not addressed during temporary wardship.)

1. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies recognize and treat **attachment disorders** early-on in care in an effort to reduce the incidence of severe behaviors often exhibited by permanent wards.
2. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies establish partnerships with community service organizations (e.g. Big Brother/Sisters) to create a **mentoring program** for permanent wards. FIA should also encourage the identification of viable adults (relatives and others) to serve as mentors for older adolescents.
3. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies train caseworkers to be more knowledgeable about **licensing rules and adoption subsidies** so they can better advise prospective guardians and adoptive parents.
4. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies provide **intensive support services** to foster homes that are considering adopting children with severe behavioral problems.
5. We recommend that FIA/POS agencies develop a protocol to **expedite adoptions** in those instances where FIA and POS agencies share casework responsibilities.
6. We recommend that the Michigan Supreme Court require that family courts invite **interested parties** to quarterly post-termination reviews of permanent wards.
7. We recommend that the Legislature explore creating a **subsidized guardianship program** as an option in those cases where adoption is not possible.

Statewide FY 2000/2001

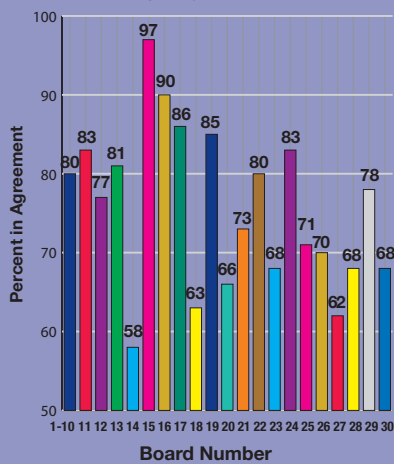
Total Reviews	2,560
Total Wards in Care	28,060

Foster Parent Appeals

(Toll-free number for foster parent appeals 1-888-866-6566)

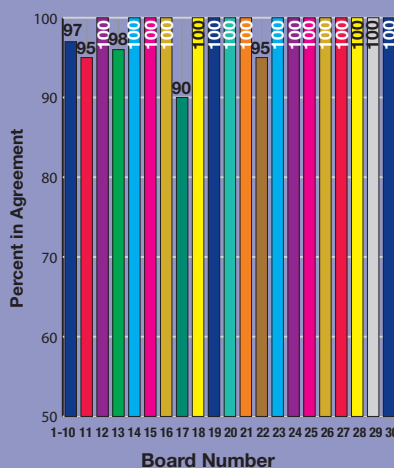
Pursuant to 1997 PA 163, foster parents may appeal the movement of a ward from their home. If the local foster care review board, which hears the appeal, agrees that a move is not in the child (ren)'s best interests, the court must hold a hearing or, if an MCI ward, the MCI Superintendent must review the case. There were 115 calls into the Foster Care Review Board Program from foster parents during the year. Eighty-three resulted in board appeal hearings, a 58% increase from the previous year. In the 83 appeal hearings, boards supported foster parents 29 times (35%) and agencies 54 times (65%).

Concurrence with Permanency Plan Temporary Wards



1-10 Wayne; 11 Oakland; 12 Macomb;
13 Genesee; 14 Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac,
St. Clair; 15 Livingston, Monroe, Washtenaw;
16 Ingham; 17 Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee;
18 Barry, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ionia,
Montcalm, Shiawassee; 19 Saginaw,
Tuscola; 20 Branch, Calhoun, St. Joseph;
21 Kent; 22 Kalamazoo; 23 Muskegon;
24 Allegan, Ottawa, VanBuren; 25 Berrien,
Cass; 26 Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella,
Midland; 27 Benzie, Lake, Manistee, Mason,
Mecosta, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola;
28 Antrim, Arenac, Crawford, Grand
Traverse, Iosco, Kalkaska, Leelanau,
Missaukee, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego,
Roscommon, Wexford; 29 Alcona, Alpena,
Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Emmet,
Luce, Mackinac, Montmorency, Presque Isle;
30 Alger, Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic,
Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette,
Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft

Concurrence with Permanency Plan Permanent Wards



These graphs indicate, by temporary and permanent wards, the percentage of agreement by the board with the permanency plan as indicated by the caseworker at each review.

2000-2001 Foster Parent Appeal Outcomes

	Support Foster Parent ¹	Support Agency
Family Independence Agency	18	30
Purchase of Service Agencies	11	24
Total	29	54

Of the 29 reviews where boards supported foster parents, courts upheld the board's decision 11 times (85%) and supported the agency two times (15%). In the 13 subsequent reviews by the MCI Superintendent, he upheld the board's decision seven times (54%) and supported the agency six times (46%). Three cases were not subsequently reviewed by either the court or MCI Superintendent because the foster parents withdrew their request or the agency rescinded its move.

Final Outcomes

Court Decisions		MCI Decisions		NH ²
FP	AG	FP	AG	
11	2	7	6	3

Foster parent appeals increased this year as more foster parents became aware of their right to request a review when a foster child was being moved from their home. Statistics indicate that boards supported an agency's decision to move a child almost twice as often as they supported the foster parent's appeal of the move. However, in many cases, the children moved had substantial special needs, needs that either were not identified early in placement, or for which the foster parent lacked specific training and support to respond to the child's behaviors within licensing standards. Children in foster care today continue to manifest more uniquely difficult and disruptive behaviors within the foster home. The Foster Care Review Board Program encourages foster care agencies to be proactive in assuring that foster parents have child specific training and support from the time a child is placed in their home to ensure the long term stability and success of the placement.

¹Must be reviewed subsequently by court or MCI Superintendent

²No follow-up court hearing/MCI review due to foster parents withdrawing request or agency rescinding move

POS Foster Care Caseworker Departure Survey

For many years review board volunteers have identified the problem of foster care caseworker turnover as a barrier to permanency for children. In fact, for several years, barrier data collected by the FCRBP ranked "Caseworker Change Delays Progress" as one of the top ten barriers to achieving permanency in a timely manner. In 1997 the FCRBP annual report recommended that "the Family Independence Agency (FIA) facilitate an independent study to determine why foster care caseworkers, both within FIA and in purchase of services (POS) agencies, leave positions so rapidly, since data suggests that change in caseworkers has an adverse effect on timely planning for children."

The problem of foster care caseworker turnover was reported elsewhere as well.

The Lansing State Journal on April 19, 2001 indicated the advocacy group Michigan's Children reported to the special House Subcommittee on Protective Services, "the turnover rate for workers in the state's foster-care system is as high as 40 percent..." The same article quoted FIA Director Douglas Howard as saying, "retaining qualified caseworkers is a problem."

The Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies (Federation) in a survey of 14 member agencies found that of 22 foster care caseworkers leaving their positions, 77% had been employed 24 months or less, 68% cited more pay as their reason for departure, and 50% noted workload size as the reason for leaving.

The 1999 Children's Ombudsman annual report recommended, "the FIA conduct an assessment of CPS and foster care worker caseloads and supervisor-to-worker ratios in each county office in order to: collect accurate statistical data regarding the size of worker caseloads, and ensure staff's ability to meet current policy and legal requirements. Such caseload assessments should be conducted annually."

Thus, there is convergent recognition that the role of the foster care caseworker is clearly in need of careful scrutiny and further study. To this end, the FCRBP Advisory Committee prepared an exit questionnaire to be completed by all caseworkers leaving foster care positions. It was the general hypothesis that burnout in foster care was due to stress, salary, and increasing job requirements. The study was facilitated by an ad hoc Advocacy Committee of the Program Advisory Committee. Although originally intended for both FIA and Purchase of Service agencies, the FIA elected to conduct its own survey.

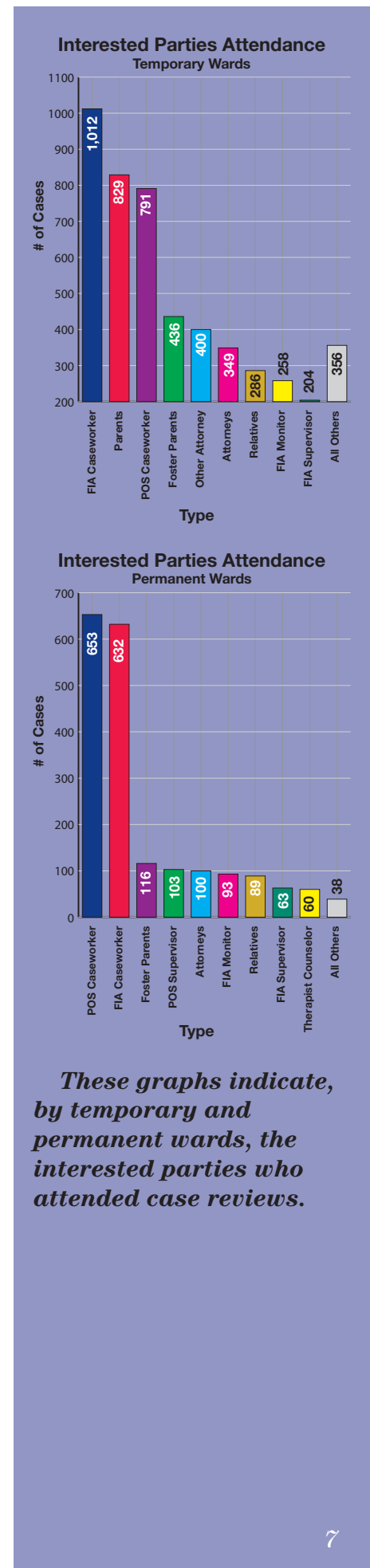
Agencies belonging to the Federation distributed surveys to foster care caseworkers leaving their positions. Seventy-six completed questionnaires were returned to the FCRBP. Surveys did not require participants to identify themselves or the agency they were leaving. The following Foster Care Review Board Program survey results were compiled from questionnaires returned by private agency foster care caseworkers during a twelve month period.

POS FOSTER CARE CASEWORKERS

Length of Service		Factors That Influenced Your Departure <small>(Question allowed for multiple responses)</small>		Top Factors That Would Have Kept You in Your Position
0-6 months	14%	Salary	70%	Better Salary
6-12 months	32%	Hours	41%	
1-2 years	32%	Bureaucracy	38%	Lower Caseload
Over 2 years	22%	Caseload size	36%	
Total	100%	Work-related stress	36%	Better Benefits
		Other reasons	10%	

Summary

As indicated above, over 75% of departing foster care caseworkers, who responded to the survey, left prior to two years in the position. Based



on the reasons noted, it appears that current salary rates simply do not compensate adequately for the stress of the job. No system with such rapid turnover can adequately meet the needs of children and families or public expectations. To retain qualified foster care caseworkers, salaries, caseload sizes, and benefits need to be improved. Additionally, other work-related stressors need to be addressed so that caseworkers don't burn out and adversely impact the children they serve.

Recommendations

1. Since POS agencies provide most of the foster care services in the state, the per diem rates should be increased for the specific purpose of increasing salaries of direct service caseworkers.
2. More paraprofessionals should be employed to assist foster care caseworkers with supervision of parenting time visits, client transportation needs, and office tasks such as data entry. Part-time paraprofessionals should be hired to work evenings and/or weekends.
3. To address stress, both the FIA and the Federation should convene a task force and/or focus group comprised of first-line foster care supervisors and caseworkers to further explore solutions to the issues of work related stress and bureaucracy. Recommendations should be disseminated to all purchase of service agencies providing foster care services with a final proposal conveyed to the Legislature and the Governor.

Chief's Endorsement

Each year, almost 200 Michigan citizens volunteer to review cases of children who have been moved to foster care after being abused or neglected. These volunteer boards, which meet on a monthly basis, not only read case materials, but interview parents, foster parents, caseworkers, attorneys, other professionals, and sometimes the children themselves. The volunteers' difficult task is to determine whether and how children should be returned to parents, or whether the children should remain in foster care. The boards make advisory recommendations to courts and agencies, focusing on the permanency plan for each child and the best way to implement that plan. Of course, the final decision rests with the court. The input of these dedicated volunteers, however, is an invaluable resource for courts and agencies entrusted with children's welfare. I hope you find the composite results of these many reviews informative and interesting.



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